
English Faculty Scholarship

2022

Educating and Debating Social and Political Issues in the Naperville Lyceum

Carl Fletcher

Stephen Perry

Cristi Eschler-Freudenrich

Jonathan Powers

Flora Khoo

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/english_ed



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Permanent URL: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/english_ed/34

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society. This content is freely provided to promote scholarship for personal study and not-for-profit educational use.

Authors

Carl Fletcher, Stephen Perry, Cristi Eschler-Freudenrich, Jonathan Powers, Flora Khoo, Brooke Dunbar-Treadwell, Beryl Nyamwange, Hanisha Besant, and Jana Duckett

Educating and Debating Social and Political Issues in the Naperville Lyceum

Carl Fletcher - Olivet Nazarene University

Stephen D. Perry - Regent University

Cristi Eschler-Freudenrich - Oral Roberts University

Jonathan Powers - Regent University

Flora Khoo - Regent University

Brooke Dunbar-Treadwell - Messiah University

Beryl Nyamwange - Regent University

Hanisha Besant - Regent University

Jana Duckett - Morgan State University

This historical research responds to a call from other scholars to allow the topics discussed in the lyceum of the nineteenth century to shed light on the social consciousness of the frontier settlements of the era. The recent discovery of the “Proceedings of the Naperville Lyceum” (1836-1843) provided the means to do this. Since political topics were clearly central to the Naperville Lyceum members, this research focused on those items. It is revealing that lyceum topics in this location were not self-absorbed. The debated topics included several global issues and did not simply champion the American status quo. It suggests that the frontier settlers of Naperville were concerned with concerns of justice as citizens of a cosmopolitan world, one in which they valued self-governance. The study further reveals how some topics have continued to be politically relevant for more than 180 years since the Naperville Lyceum began. Many of the same topics are prominent in modern political discussion and debate.

Carl Fletcher was a PhD student at Regent University and a faculty member at Olivet Nazarene University in the Fall of 2015 when his life was cut short. This project that he had begun was finished by several of his colleagues and his professor in memoriam. His memory is cherished, and this work is dedicated to those he left behind all too early.

Other Author Bios are briefly provided as an appendix to this manuscript.



Platforms societies use for debating and discussing questions of political importance have continually evolved over time. While today, someone might “debate” via social media (Gautreaux, et al., 2016) or on a talk radio call in program, in the early 1800s the lyceum provided a common political debate or discussion forum. Initially lyceums were locations where the public was encouraged to gather to hear presentations from multiple perspectives about a variety of topics. This was seen as an educational activity. The lyceum movement involved a cross-section of the public and presentations were for that varied audience. A lyceum presentation implied the speech to be given was something useful, thought-provoking, provided for discussion, and provided a better understanding of life (Ray, 2013).

When we dig into what issues societies debated in the early 1800s, we are learning something about the people, places, and the times they lived in. Electronic media has enabled the homogenization of society. But in the early 1800s on the cusp of the telegraph, the first electronic medium, society was more diverse. Thus, each lyceum’s records of groups that met in specific states, territories, cities, or wherever hold value to understanding that people group and their consciousness about issues of the day. Lyceum records are widely scattered and unpublished (Ray 2006). Therefore, when one is found, it is a treasure to be sorted, itemized, and categorized. A lyceum record from the frontier town of Naperville, Illinois, was located in the Illinois state archives. It was a recent find and had not yet been probed for evidence of the consciousness of people of that area of the country. Further, much of the literature surrounding lyceums is connected with a later lecture function of lyceums, the more common function closer to and after the US Civil War, making the debate function this paper explores in the case of Naperville even more important (Bode, 1956; Wright 2013). Thus, this paper will look for themes and categories of topics debated during the years of the Naperville Lyceum’s existence to shed light on the issues that people in the frontier west seemed to think were most important.

There is great significance in lyceums of the nineteenth-century, providing a means of inexpensive evening entertainment and instruction (Spearman, 2009) as well as the diffusion of knowledge. Ray (2005) indicated that these small organizations were used by attendees as part of their process of making sense of their existence in society. She explained that this related to their

place in the world, the nation, and even simply their own community. Study of debate questions should help us better understand what these clubs struggled with regarding international, national, and local political issues, whether the questions were planned in advance or simply random questions put up for debate by members of the lyceum. This study will attempt to glimpse the political consciousness of a new settlement of the early 1800s in Northern Illinois by examining the topics of interest to its lyceum attendees. In this research, political consciousness simply refers to both the specific topics and to the nature of those topics as subjects that were either important for day-to-day function in the frontier or for the broader philosophy of American or global governance. While interpreting the political consciousness, this study will contextualize how some events of the day seem to have had an impact on the topics chosen for debate.

The Naperville Lyceum

Like many of the scattered lyceum locations, the Naperville Lyceum was largely unheralded until the discovery of its proceedings record book. The artifact was only connected to Naperville Illinois in 2006 when the owner of B & L Rootenberg Rare Books came into possession of the proceedings and began to trace the names to determine the origin of the book, discovering the Naperville Heritage Society (Naperville Lyceum Fact Sheet, 2006). The authors of this manuscript discovered it while searching the Illinois Digital Archives where it is readily accessible in digital form (“Proceedings of,” 1836-1843).

The proceedings are an historical manuscript detailing the business of the Naperville Lyceum, the local group was established just five years after the village of Naperville, Illinois, was born (Naperville Lyceum, 2012). The lyceum included some of the community’s founders, including Capt. Joseph Naper, a frontiersman who sold his interest in a ship called *The Telegraph* and used the money to purchase fertile land south of the DuPage River, which had vast woods to the north. He and his brother John built a lumber mill also to provide the material to build the buildings and houses for the town (“Naperville Heritage,” 2012). A flyer published by the Naperville Heritage Society indicates the group of 15 members met weekly from October through March in

homes, schoolhouses and the county courthouse debating questions of science, religion and government (“Naperville Lyceum,” 2012).

The handwritten book reads like minutes of a business meeting including dues owed and paid, fines levied for bad behavior or absence, the rules of the society, the listing of officers elected every fourth week of the meetings to the positions of President, Secretary, Treasurer and Vice President, and perhaps most importantly the topics discussed at the lyceum each week (“Proceedings of,” 1836-1843). In this article the emphasis is on social and political issues as mentioned in the title. Not all topics are political or deal with a social problem. For example, one question asked whether the arts were more developed in that day than in ancient Greece. Another asked to consider the question of whether the reforms of Luther and Calvin were more influential on the world than the Declaration of Independence. While one could argue all topics contain social and political elements, we have analyzed only those that were clearly focused in that direction.

Since this was a debating club, it should come as no surprise that there must have been some debate regarding the naming of the group itself as page three of the manuscript, presumably written by the secretary at the time Nathan Allen Jr., calls it the “Journal of the proceeding of the Naperville Debating Society” (p. 3, See Figure 1). Lyceums were sometimes called by the name antebellum debate clubs (Ray, 2004) explaining the variation in the name. However, this is the only reference within the 171-page manuscript to that name. Other references include “The Naperville Association” (1836-1843, p. 24) and there appears to be an amendment to the rules, also referred to on several occasions as the “preamble and constitution of Naperville Lyceum” (p. 44), to issue a decision stating “Art[icle] 1 To be called the N V [Naperville] Lyceum” (1836-1843, p. 30).

Ray (2010a) mentioned the Naperville Lyceum in her research stating that the lyceum, which predated the community’s first newspaper, conducted debates. Ray also notes that in Illinois, manuscript minutes have only been located for a few of the lyceums including Naperville, Upper Alton and the Illinois State Lyceum making this artifact, one of only three in the state and important for research to create a picture of what the contemporary “west” was interested in discussing. Ray (2013) opened a critical research direction based out of the records of debate questions of other lyceums from the antebellum era clubs. She suggests the need

for further study beyond her brief treatment of these lyceums in her statement:

Although research may well uncover different types of questions for analysis, it now appears lyceum debating societies run by white men in the antebellum era were more often places for the inculcation of solidarity with a nation than for the development of a commitment to humanity writ large (p. 32).

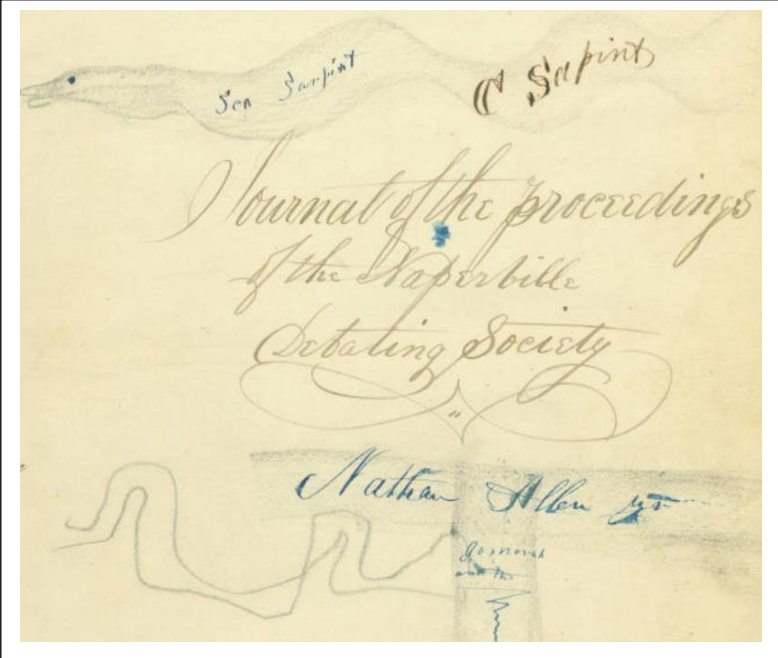


Figure 1: Image of the original name of the society in calligraphy with various childlike scribbles, presumably added at some point by a child of an owner of the manuscript. © Naperville Heritage Society, used by permission, all rights reserved.

The present research will challenge that statement by analyzing the questions debated in Naperville to understand whether they were about solidarity with community, nation, or a broader swath of humanity.

Another reason the Naperville Lyceum specifically should be researched is that the source is the original primary handwritten document of the lyceum. A more than six-decade old study of topics discussed in early lyceums also identified many of the

subjects through secondary sources. These sources were typically newspaper notices published for the promotion of attendance at the lyceum debates (Ewbank, 1956). Because of this, a historian would have an idea of topics that were worthy of promotion in newspapers to attract an audience, but no actual full record of the topics debated. That is what is available through the manuscript artifacts of the Naperville Lyceum, making it imperative for further analysis. Similarly, the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield was researched through the *Sangamo Journal*, a newspaper of the time. The Springfield Illinois based group is where Abraham Lincoln, a young attorney and member of a debating society in New Salem Illinois, addressed the lyceum with an early address (Ray, 2010a). Did someone similar address the Naperville group? This research evaluates the speakers for such possibilities.

Lyceum Literature Review

Historians agree that discussions within the context of nineteenth-century American history point to one Massachusetts man for the origin of the lyceum, Josiah Holbrook ("American Lyceum," 1829; Bode, 1956). The American Lyceum Movement provided a foundation for adult education outside of the more traditional university system. It recognized and attempted to meet the needs of adult learners in a non-formal setting within one's community. "Holbrook's legacy evokes the organization of complex social environments conducive to the transmission of applied sciences and egalitarian adult education" (Khrapak, 2014, p. 47). So the origins of the lyceum were not purposefully related to political discussion, though as this paper will argue, such discussion was heavily woven into the discourse in the new settlement in northern Illinois.

In the mid-1820s Holbrook presented his concept of having a new educational journal that would benefit the "whole community" (Bode, 1956, p. 10). A republished letter to the editor oft attributed to Holbrook stated:

I take the liberty, to submit for your consideration a few articles as regulations for associations for mutual instruction in sciences, and in useful knowledge generally...it seems to me that if associations...(could) be started in our villages and upon a general plan they would increase with great rapidity, and do more for the general diffusion of knowledge and for raising the

moral and intellectual taste of our countrymen, than any other expedient which can possibly be devised (quoted in "Means of Improving," 1826, p. 594-595).

Holbrook was concerned about what he saw happening in society, specifically with the young men and women. He hoped to help "divert the attention of the young from places and practices which lead to dissipation and to ruin" (Bode, 1956, p. 12).

Holbrook's proposal was an "idea for lyceum" because in his initial article in the *American Journal of Education*, the term was absent (Bode, 1956; Ray, 2006). The term, however, was in use within a month of the publication as the idea became reality in Branch 1 of the American Lyceum, planted in Millbury, Massachusetts. The movement caught on quickly and continued to grow within the state with the founding of the Boston Lyceum. It was first referenced as the "Boston Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge" with the support of newspapers promoting Holbrook's ideas (Bode, 1956). By 1828, others were writing about lyceums as an important part of common education, arguing that libraries and academies would have a symbiotic relationship with lyceums with attendees seeking out books on interesting subjects and with academies providing interesting lectures (Muenscher, 1828). In 1829, lyceum in various towns of Massachusetts were forming relationships and a kind of association of lyceums was occurring ("American Lyceum," 1829). Holbrook's stop in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1831 was the beginning of lyceums in the state of Illinois. Bode (1956) indicated lyceums were more easily established in central Illinois, far south of Napierville, as much of the northern portion of the state was still frontier. A Chicago Lyceum held its first meeting in December 1834, but it had died by 1844 due to "sheer neglect" (p. 97).

Holbrook continued to build on his idea of what the lyceum should be. He had included in his original idea, a membership fee structure that was in practice throughout the lyceum movement. Within the same year of introducing the lyceum he began a campaign to promote lyceums through his own personal visits to communities as well as pamphlets promoting a structure of lyceums as primarily science based educational organizations positioned at the local, county and state level (Holbrook, 1829/1959). This structure never actually caught hold beyond initial lyceums started by Holbrook that soon pulled back to how lyceums are remembered today, as independent, community-based

organizations of individuals interested in mutual instruction of their members (Ray, 2010b).

Most lyceums came and went within a short period of time after Holbrook established the practice, Bode (1956) indicated the civil war put a natural stop to the progress of the movement. The heyday of the local lyceum seemed to be from the 1830s through the mid-1840s, after which it evolved into a speaking circuit. Bode discusses the route from New England to the Midwest that lyceums took in his book *The American Lyceum*, considered to be the foremost early research on the topic. Interestingly, where southern leadership had taken hold of a region, the movement would pass by and seek pockets of New Englanders who had moved west. Southern leadership, as perceived by Holbrook and the early promoters of lyceums, had no interest. An example Bode showed for this would be much of the state of Indiana was bypassed by promoters because of the influence of the South (Bode, 1956).

Ray (2006) notes that these groups under the name lyceum were established to promote debate, to create a setting for individual and group study, and to provide a forum for members to lecture to one another about their own areas of expertise. She notes early advocates defended the choice of lyceum by identifying it as a neutral, universal term referring to no particular class. Any kind of demographic grouping, by age, sex, or occupation could gather in a lyceum, though an early description notes it is “peculiarly accessible to the agricultural class” (“American lyceum,” 1829, p. 50). While Ray in 2013 indicates that it often only included women conditionally as observers and honorary members but with limited powers, early writings emphasized examples of woman. For example, Muenscher (1828) says contributions came from many classes and “not infrequently females” (p. 703). One woman brought together interested parties to study geology. “Parents, and in particular mothers,” (“American Lyceum,” 1829, p. 45) were encouraged to use lyceums with their children. In the Concord Lyceum, article 2 of the constitution allowed for each member to admit two women or two of his own 8-14 year-old children (Ray, 2004). In other places pains were taken to avoid gendered language with words like “every individual” or “unassisted individuals” (“American Lyceum,” 1829, p. 48-49). The constitution of the Naperville Lyceum also allowed for honorary members within article 13, but required the unanimous vote of the membership. It is worth noting that no honorary members, and thus no women, were

ever listed in their proceedings (“Proceedings of,” 1836-1843) preventing this paper from focusing in that direction.

Ray notes that while the ideal of inclusiveness never materialized in lyceums, they did provide opportunities for some that were not able to take advantage of formal or common education. Ray affirms that these debating societies for those that “lacked access to higher education” were a good means to gain education and acquire culture in a socially desirable setting (2004).

Lyceums gave members an opportunity to gain knowledge while practicing their oratory in a public setting, thus moving them into a stronger social position with the community in politics or business as esteemed members of lyceum. Previous research has asked whether participation in lyceums opened doors for greater business and community leadership success (Ewbank, 1956). Perhaps the same question can be asked of the Naperville Lyceum participants.

Ray (2006) explains lyceum as a place where the community membership came together for sense-making through representation of one’s opinion and understanding of issues and societal problems. The debates included validation of opposing points of view and respect for others’ opinions through the rules or constitution of the lyceum, as evidenced from Article 10 of the “Proceedings of the Naperville Lyceum” (1836-1843). It said, “The presiding officer for the time being may impose a fine for disorderly conduct or contempt of the Chair on any offending member” (p. 168). This allowed for the early voices of reform through presentation of alternative points of view. In 2013, Ray explained the experience of lyceum members by viewing their experience from a cosmopolitan perspective, she said it was possible to trace the ways our predecessors understood the world and themselves, whether they thought of themselves as citizens of local, national, international or transnational places.

While Holbrook’s concept of the lyceum was that it facilitated inclusivity of every demographic of people, research by many authors (Bode, 1956; Gross, 2015; Ray, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010a, 2013; Rieser, 2001; Scott, 1980) notes that most lyceums were made up primarily of an elite membership, characterized by Ray (2010a) as white Protestant men, young professionals, merchants and skilled laborers. The study and analysis of the questions debated at a lyceum would offer a reflection of the concerns of the community, or perhaps only the concerns of the

elites who tended to be members. Free African Americans, especially in urban areas, sometimes had their own lyceum groups (Ray, 2013). And while Ray (2013) states that “most questions clearly situated debaters in their roles as citizens of the United States, not citizens of the world, and the language usually assumed American self-interest,” there is room for further analysis of the questions to prove or disprove her theory.

Makeup of the Membership

In an effort to reconstitute the Naperville Lyceum's historical importance in time and place, it is important to look at the lyceum's members and attendees. In their roles, lyceum participants might have been elevated to higher social rank, either through their activity in the group or via access to other lyceum participants.

The membership of the Naperville society included 28 individuals identified in the proceedings. Among the established “elites” who were members of the lyceum was the person who kept the Naperville proceedings, Nathan Allen, Jr. He was an attorney and helped decide boundary claims of landowners. On one occasion in 1836, the same year as the lyceum was founded, he was a primary participant in evicting a family of squatters who had determined to take over land initially claimed by a Mr. Frothingham in a nearby town. Allen was among the 50 horsemen who rode out to the claim, scaring off the settlers, tearing down their erected house and, after an impassioned stump speech by Allen, burning the pile of rubble (Richmond & Vallette, 1857). Clearly Allen was a community leader from the inception of the lyceum and was later a member of the initial board of trustees of the Naperville Library when it was founded in 1845 (Naperville Centennial, 1931). Another member of the lyceum who was in a leadership position was Richard M. Sweet. He was the town's first voter and the “scholar to the first school,” both in 1832 (Naperville Centennial, 1931, p. 6).

Lewis Ellsworth settled in Naperville prior to 1838 and was elected as a probate justice and county judge in 1839. He was succeeded in that post first by Allen and later by John J. Kimball, another member of the lyceum (Richmond & Vallette, 1857). Ellsworth was also a business owner establishing the DuPage County Nurseries, and a donor of property to the Congregational and Baptist societies (Naperville Centennial, 1931). Kimball served

in additional public service rolls as early as 1839 holding titles as county treasurer, county surveyor, and justice of the peace (Richmond & Vallette, 1857).

Other early elites included H.L. Peaslee who served as county coroner starting in 1839 (Richmond & Vallette, 1857) and both Stephen J. Scott and Selinus M. Skinner who were election judges at the first election of county officers in DuPage County in 1839 (Naperville Centennial, 1931). Scott and his family were the first settlers in the town in 1826, and he was elected county treasurer in 1839 and served for four years. Skinner was elected as county recorder that same year (Richmond & Vallette, 1857; Naperville Centennial, 1931). Peasley was also a business owner of Peasley and Company and developer of a public works project (Naperville Centennial, 1931).

Others who held official office during the lyceum years who attended the lyceum included attorney Patrick Ballingall who helped decide boundary claims with Allen and served as Circuit Clerk for DuPage from 1840-1842 (Richmond & Vallette, 1857; City of Naperville, 1874). Erastus Wight was the town coroner during those same years (Richmond & Vallette, 1857).

While nine of the 28 listed individuals were already “elites” of the town, those who may have ascended the ladder of the society as a result of connections they made and participation in the lyceum could include four who are noted as office holders starting the final year of the lyceum and continuing for another decade and a half. C.B. Hosmer was a member of the DuPage County Bar (Richmond & Vallette, 1857). Eli Bill may have been Ballingall’s successor as Circuit Court Clerk since he held the position in 1843. He also was a company commander in the Mexican War (Richmond & Vallette, 1857; Naperville Centennial, 1931).

James Jeremiah Hunt attended the lyceum but later was elected Sheriff in the 1850s and served on a building management committee for a prominent building in 1858. But this would suggest it took over a decade for him to rise to leadership in the community. No other committee members had lyceum ties, however, so any role of the lyceum is spurious at best. Hunt’s career also included a stint as captain of the Naperville Artillery Company (Richmond & Vallette, 1857). Michael Hines was another resident and lyceum member who, though settled in town prior to 1838, is noted for having his first position as a village trustee at the

Naperville founding in 1857 (Richmond & Vallette, 1857; Naperville Centennial, 1931).

But the lyceum was not just for leaders in the community. As expected from the literature, early lyceums involved a cross section of the community and the same seems to have been true in Naperville's case. William Rose and Robert Potter were two who are noted as early settlers but had no other designations of note in the history records of the town. C.B. Hosmer was an attorney but held no obvious leadership position. Rev. J.H. Prentiss pastored the Lutheran Church in addition to his lyceum membership, and that was a position of leadership, but he held no elected or town office that is noted (Naperville Centennial, 1931). Many other of the 28 attendees listed in the proceedings were not identified beyond the lyceum. This may indicate that they were also among the "common man" in attendance, but perhaps skilled laborers, a group Ray includes among the elite, would not have been identified by their trade. Names like James D. Ayman, J.H. Giddings, J.H. (or R.H.) Jefferson, Henry Knickerbocker, John Pope, J.B. Pratt, Joseph M. Salisbury, S.W. Talmadge, and E.G. Wright were similarly unidentified in scanning early town records other than through their participation in the lyceum meetings as noted in the proceedings. The fact that the membership was varied across classes of men of the town suggests a reason the topics found included a wide range of subjects.

Evaluating the Artifact

The record of the lyceum's meetings was handwritten but had been transcribed in the digital record, presumably by someone connected with the Naperville Public Library, which provided the digitized collection to the Illinois State Library's Illinois Digital Archives. The document is 174 pages long and was electronically searchable on the Illinois Digital Archives' website. Both the original handwritten pages and the transcriptions are available for every digital page visited.

Researchers perused the document from front to back, making note of political topics that had been debated. These topics were then grouped into categories based on subject themes and issue scope as indicated in the following sections of the paper. Topics that aligned with specific historical contexts of the age were also noted to identify how aware the participants seemed to be of

the outside world rather than just issues that were close to home. Finally, topics that were prevalent in the literature on lyceums generally also served to help organize the identification of themes.

Political Topics and Related Societal Context

Members debated questions from different orientations. Some were issues of present concern. Others were issues that were educational from an historic perspective. Since the literature clearly indicates that questions of abolition and temperance were common debate topics at lyceums, a perusal of the Naperville Lyceum's debate topics confirms that both were debated. Both were debated three different times with questions like, "*Is the traffic (in ardent) spirits (as a drink) immoral?*" along with, "*Would the abolition of Slavery in the U. S. be beneficial to the people, Nation, or the Slave?*" and "*Ought Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Colombia?*" The fact that they returned to these questions indicated the importance of the topic to the political consciousness of the Naperville Lyceum members.

Also similar to lyceums elsewhere, Women and women's rights were also on the docket in Naperville. The Naperville Lyceum charter, according to Article 13, allows women as observers ("Proceedings of," 1836-1843) but they had very little influence otherwise. "*Ought females to be admitted to the right of suffrage on the same legal qualifications that are required of males?*" and "*Are females susceptible to as much mental cultivation as males?*" were two of the questions found in proceedings of the lyceum. With the debate about women's rights in full swing nationally, it became a topic of greater discussion in lyceums in 1837 and 1838. Ray (2006) notes that abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimke toured New England lecturing for citizenship for women. It would be difficult to call Naperville a town that added fuel to the women's rights movement based on the proceedings of the lyceum; however, the willingness to discuss and debate such volatile topics suggests a population with an interest in issues of social justice and a willingness to consider them. While not as progressive as towns where women were given the stage to share their thoughts on women's rights, Naperville was willing to allow women to attend as guests and was willing to engage in public discourse about these ideas, while some lyceums in other parts of the country still refused to let women in the building (Ray, 2006). The discussion of temperance, slavery, and women's rights

90 years before the last of those was approved in America by a constitutional amendment suggests the frontier of Naperville's social and political consciousness was very concerned about discussing issues of justice, morality, and human rights.

National issues of the 1830s and 1840s. One Naperville Lyceum question debated "*Does foreign immigration endanger our civil and religious institutions?*" During the 1830s, the rate of immigration quadrupled from 143,439 arrivals for the period of 1821 to 1830 to 599,125 between 1831 and 1840. New immigrants came from a wide range of European countries. But most of the 1830's arrivals came from Ireland (207,381) and Germany (152,454). New arrivals suddenly spiked from 22,633 in 1831 to 60,482 in 1832. Growth at the levels of 1832 continued throughout the rest of the decade (Bankston, n.d., para. 12). It seems likely that this influx prompted the Illinois settlers to debate this question.

Education itself was not a popular topic at the Naperville Lyceum according to records, but political debate surrounding education was evident. One topic that linked immigration and education in a political debate included: "*Would our country be better defended by fortifying its borders than by enlightening educating its citizens?* [sic]" and "*Ought the property of the United States educate the children of the United States?*" which indicate both educational and political concerns. Another topic situated similarly would be, "*Does wealth give its possessor more power than knowledge?*" ("Proceedings of," 1836-1843, p. 17). The syntax error in the wording might suggest the educational deficiencies of the day too, something that is evident in several of the topics listed for debate. Still, these topics indicate a society of the time that was considering its vision for the importance of education. Moreover, these questions indicate a society deeply considering the availability of education across economic brackets. Debate questions appealed to a wide range of education levels from laborers to political leaders based on typical attendees including the range of members in Naperville's lyceum, suggesting a push away from the division of social classes, a trend that was occurring with the penny press in that same time period (Perry, 2004). Watkinson notes the influence of William Maclure during the period who "firmly believed that there was a conspiracy of the elites to deny education to the 'laborious or productive classes'" (Watkinson, 1990, pp. 362-365). Maclure's then-radical views included

government funded education, which he believed would lead to greater social equality. He would establish early vocational training and “workingmen’s institutes” in neighboring Indiana; however, his influence in the lyceum system extended far beyond that (p. 365). Clearly this discussion was impacting the political consciousness of the Naperville Lyceum’s members.

Other political topics of a national nature included questions about war, governmental powers, political parties, and efforts to dissolve the United States. On War they debated, “*Is an offensive war in any case justifiable?*” and “*Would the United States be justifiable in declaring war against Great Britain under existing conditions?*” They debated that second question in similar form a second time. On questions of governmental powers, debates asked, “*Ought the veto power to be abolished?*” “*Will the sub-treasury system add to executive power?*” and “*Ought the militia system be abolished?*” Themes of government involvement in banking came up in additional debates as well.

In addition to these, there were questions of various general policy positions that were debated. Some of these would sound familiar to people today. These included “*Ought capital punishment to be abolished?*” “*Would a high tariff be expedient?*” “*Would a direct tax be expedient?*” “*Ought gambling to be prohibited by law?*” and “*Were our forefathers justifiable in taking possession of this country?*” Ray (2013) noted most questions situated debaters as citizens of the United States, not citizens of the world, and assumed American self-interest. However, in the list above are a range of questions that could be arguably include a global perspective, especially the last example above. But these themes also show a political consciousness that government ought to be of, by, and for the people. While that might seem automatic to twenty-first century Americans, the adults in Naperville would likely have had parents or grandparents who lived under the rule of King George before the American Revolution. This demonstrates the inculcation of self-government ideas in these settlers of the frontier.

In debating political parties they asked, “*Are the Whigs justifiable in their recent course towards General Tyler?*” They also debated, “*Is party spirit in this country more beneficial than injurious?*” and “*Are the principles advocated by the Whig party at the present day the same as those advocated by the Whigs of [17]76?*” While there was still 20 years before secession of the Southern states would bring about a civil war, questions of

dissolving the union were on the minds of members as they debated, “*Ought J. Q. Adams to be censured by the Congress of the United States for . . . presenting his petitions for the dissolution of the Union?*” and “*Ought Congress to receive petitions to secure petitions for the dissolution of the Union or for any object which tends to the destruction of the existing government?*” The opposite direction of these questions was the debate on “*Ought Texas to [be] admitted to the Union?*”

Global issues. Some topics were clearly along the lines of global issues, though admittedly the list is only about 1/10th as long as the topics of American self-interest. The lyceum debated a centuries old question, “*Was Queen Elizabeth justifiable in executing the Queen of Scots?*” This question revolved around the role of women in politics to a degree. Queen Mary was propelled to the political forefront when her father died. She was only six days old when she became the Queen of Scots. In 1558, Queen Elizabeth became the heir to the English throne. However, from the perspective of Catholic Europe, Queen Mary Stuart was the rightful heir to the throne as Queen of England, whereas Queen Elizabeth was seen as an illegitimate child. When a plot was uncovered to put Mary on the throne, she was imprisoned and sentenced to death for treason. Queen Elizabeth agonized over signing the death warrant of another rightful heir. She told the French Ambassador that she had been in tears over the decision (Squaducation, 2020). On February 1, 1587, Elizabeth signed the death warrant.

Why the lyceum chose to debate this point in the 1800s, about 250 years later, may be related to a prominent anniversary of the event, though the date of that lyceum debate was not given, or perhaps it was simply related to the interest in education that was central to the purpose of such organizations. But whatever the case, it was just one of the global topics addressed. They also debated whether the Allied Powers appropriately banished Napoleon to the island of St. Helena and later whether England was justified in doing the same thing. They also debated whether Napoleon’s actions had been more beneficial than injurious to Europe. Further, they asked, “*Is it true policy for the Canadian government to execute patriots taken prisoners of war?*” and “*Were the dethronement and execution of Charles 1st of England justifiable?*”

Local/state issues. Local and Illinois topics were debated only slightly more frequently than the global topics. Among local political topics were, “*Are those who have claims in the Big Park [Woods?] justifiable in withholding them from actual settlers?*” and “*Is the claim set up by Wisconsin to a part of the territory of Illinois legal and just?*” Finally, they considered “*Would the State of Illinois be justifiable in repudiating the state debt?*”

Conclusion

In answering the call for evaluating how lyceum debate topics shed light on the social and political collective consciousness of the western settlements of the day in Illinois, this paper has focused on how political topics were considered by a group of people meeting only a few years after starting their town in the northern part of the state. The debate topics certainly reflect interest in abolition of slavery and women’s rights among the topics. But these settlers were not satisfied with domestic topics and branched out to discuss political issues of a global nature in addition to debating questions across a range of governmental issues.

Furthermore, in contrast to Ray’s (2013) findings that the topics of debate reflected self-interest as members of the United States, the themes in this study suggest the citizens of Naperville may have seen things differently. They debated questions that considered the wellbeing and national sovereignty of other nations when they questioned whether the American Revolution was justified or whether Napoleon was treated right by being exiled. These questions seem to stem from a broader sense of natural law or justice rather than self-preservation and self-interest. Of course, some questions dealt with taxes and the good of the country, but the overall theme of questions at least recognizes that if the question was something needing debate, then there was an option that the US action on a topic was wrong. One debater is listed to have taken the negative position and another the positive on each topic. What this document does not tell us is whether a self-interest side would have tended to come out on top in most people’s minds.

Some of the topics the lyceum addressed would still be pertinent today. Maybe this is an indication that those issues don’t have and never will have a clean one-sided answer. They are questions worthy of debate, but perhaps only to maintain

awareness of the importance of the pros and cons related to how they are exercised by the government. Capital punishment, taxation, school funding, gambling, and even questions of how the country was established surely made for lively conversation.

Unfortunately, the “Proceedings of the Naperville Lyceum” only provide us a look at the topics and the rules of debate through which they were engaged. We can only imagine that, like the Lincoln Douglas debates, each side would have been given equal time with a chance for the side that went first to rebut the other at some point. What they said and whether they came to consensus on some issues as to the victor on an issue are lost to history. Similarly, the depth of debate is not evident in the proceedings. When they debated whether war was justifiable, for example, did they turn to philosophers such as Cicero, Augustine, or Aquinas who wrote about the proper execution of a just war, or did they simply debate from the different opinions heard at the local tavern? It is unlikely that we will ever know. Still, this chance to look at the listing of the political and social content of the primary “medium” of the day in a frontier settlement town in Illinois provides a window into the heart and soul of a people seeking to build a better tomorrow, both structurally as they built a town, and intellectually as they educated and contrasted their views on the issues of the day. While not every topic was listed, all were considered for the categories they would illuminate, and representative topics were provided to illustrate the claims.

Further research could look at the non-political topics that were addressed by the lyceum, such as whether it was better to marry or remain celibate, whether law or divinity made people more likely to be moral people, or “*Are sandhill cranes as good as turkeys for culinary purposes?*” But those questions will have to wait for another study.

By looking at the makeup of attendees or membership of the lyceum, it was clear that many leaders of the town, people who ran businesses, had professional occupations, and who held political offices, were contributors to the group. Since it is impossible to disprove that others also fit the “white elite” label, hindsight only suggests that the lack of evidence for elite status is evidence that members were among the “average” citizen class. Perhaps their leader contributions have simply been lost to time. But it is more likely that the varied group of people of different classes contributed to the varied topics discussed. Questions such

as whether Mary Queen of Scots should have been executed or whether the writings of Calvin and Luther were more influential than the Declaration of Independence are quite theoretical in nature. One can see these questions appealing to the more highly educated group such as a lawyer, minister, or doctor. In contrast, questions about whether the property of the United States should pay for the education of its citizens is much more of an applied question as are questions about women being given the right to vote or whether veto power should be abolished. Those questions would have affected the lives of the common (wo)man and the elite classes.

Further research might explore how the Naperville Lyceum's debate topics shed light on the religious concerns of these people settling the western frontier town of Naperville, Illinois. They might also show how the debates provided advice for day-to-day life activities of a frontier family.

References

- “American lyceum, or society for the improvement of schools and the diffusion of useful knowledge.” (1829). Reprinted in *American Journal of Education*, 4, 40-53.
<https://archive.org/stream/americanjournal01russgoog#page/n47/mode/2up>.
- Bankston III, Carl. (n.d.). *History of immigration, 1783-1891*.
https://www.academia.edu/937663/American_Immigration_History
- Bode, C. L. (1956). *The American lyceum*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- City of Naperville (1874). Combination Atlas Map of DuPage County.
<http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/npl/id/11053/rec/1>
- Ewbank, H. L. J. (1956). Current interest topics discussed in the lyceums. *Speech Monographs*, 23(4), 284-287.
- Gautreaux, R., Davie, W. R., & Montagnet, E. (2016, Oct. 15). Framing the patient protection and affordable care act: A content analysis of Democratic and Republican Twitter feeds. Paper presented at the Broadcast Education Association Super Regional Conference, Columbia, SC.
- Gross, R. A. (2015). Talk of the town [PDF]. *The American Scholar*, 84(3), 31-43.
- Holbrook, J. (1829/1959). The lyceums: To improve schools and diffuse useful knowledge. Reprinted in C. H. Grattan (Ed.) *American ideas about adult education, 1710-1951* (pp. 26-36). New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Khrapak, V. (2014). Reflections on the American lyceum: The legacy of Josiah Holbrook and the transcendental sessions. *Journal of Philosophy & History of Education*, 64, 47-62.
- “Means of improving university education.” (1826). *American Journal of Education*, 1, 582-596.

- Muenschler, J. (1828). Common education. *American Journal of Education*, 3(11), 689-703.
- Naperville Centennial 1831 to 1931* (1931). Fort Payne Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Naperville, Illinois.
<http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/npl/id/7492/rec/1>
- Naperville Lyceum Fact Sheet* [PDF]. (2006, February 9).
- "Naperville lyceum: Naperville heritage society stories" [PDF]. (2012). Naperville Heritage Society.
<http://www.napersettlement.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/317>.
- "Naperville Heritage Society Library/Archives Collections." (2012). Naperville Heritage Society.
<https://www.napersettlement.org/DocumentCenter/View/861/Collection8Naper?bidId=>
- Perry, S. D. (2004). *A consolidated history of media* (4th ed.). Bloomington, IL: Epistologic.
- "Proceedings of the Naperville Lyceum." (1836-1843). Naperville Heritage Society, Naperville, IL.
<http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/npl/id/11241/rec/1>
- Ray, A. G. (2003). Public argument in the nineteenth-century United States. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 39(4), 274-282.
- Ray, A. G. (2004). The permeable public: Rituals of citizenship in antebellum men's debating clubs. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 41(1), 1-16.
- Ray, A. G. (2005). *The lyceum and public culture in the nineteenth century United States*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Ray, A. G. (2006). What hath she wrought? Women's rights and the nineteenth century lyceum. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 9(2), 183-213.
- Ray, A. G. (2010a). Learning leadership: Lincoln at the lyceum, 1838. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 13(3), 349-387.
- Ray, A. G. (2010b). Living and learning with the lyceum: A reflection on invention. *Review of Communication*, 10(3), 236-248.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15358590903536486>
- Ray, A. G. (2013). How cosmopolitan was the lyceum, anyway? In T. F. Wright (Ed.), *The cosmopolitan lyceum: Lecture culture and the globe in nineteenth-century America* (pp. 23-41). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Richmond, C.W., & Vallette, H.F., (1857, January 1). *History of the County of Du Page Illinois*, Scripps, Bross & Spears.
<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=XHIUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA6>
- Rieser, A. (2001). Lyceums, Chautauquas, and Institutes for useful knowledge. In M. Cayton & P. Williams (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of American cultural and intellectual history*. Farmington, MI: Gale.
- Scott, D. M. (1980). The popular lecture and the creation of a public in mid-nineteenth-century America. *The Journal of American History*, 66(4), 791-809.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1887637>
- Spearman, M. (2009). Teachers' lyceum in early nineteenth-century America. *American Educational History Journal*, 38(1/2), 207-218.
- Squaducation (2020, Feb 6). *Elizabeth I signs death warrant*.
<https://www.squaducation.com/blog/elizabeth-i-signs-death-warrant>

- Watkinson, J. D. (1990). Useful Knowledge? Concepts, Values, and Access in American Education, 1776-1840. *History of Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 351-370.
- Wright, T. F. (2013). [Introduction]. In T. F. Wright (Ed.), *The cosmopolitan lyceum: Lecture culture and the globe in nineteenth-century America* (pp. 1-22). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Additional author Bios:

Stephen D. Perry, Ph.D., is Professor of Communication at Regent University. His research interests emphasize media, religion, government, and history. He is Publisher and Executive Editor of *Epistemic*. ORCID ID: **0000-0002-4320-392X**.

Cristi Eschler-Freudenrich, Ph.D., is Chair of the School of Communication & Public Affairs Oral Roberts University. Her recent research considers media history, religious rhetoric, and their influence in society. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6666-2531.

Jonathan D. Powers, Ph.D., is an Adjunct Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences at Regent University. His interest is in production design for film & television, and communications studies

Flora Khoo, Ph.D., is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the School of Communication and the Arts at Regent University. She won the Kenneth Hardwood and Mass Communication and Society dissertation awards. Her academic research interests include media history, communication and terrorism, the U.S. presidency and public opinion.

Brooke Dunbar-Treadwell, Ph.D., of Messiah University researches the impact of hyper-personal communication, invitational rhetoric, cognitive dissonance, and dehumanization in both connected and divisive online spaces. She has researched the take-a-knee protests and the 2020 U.S. elections.

Beryl Nyamwange, Ph.D., has keen interest in Social Policy and Intercultural and Crisis Communication research. With extensive cross-cultural living in several continents and countries, Beryl's research interests include historical and rhetorical analyses of communication perspectives of the marginalized.

Hanisha Besant, Ph.D., is an adjunct professor at Regent University with the School of Communication and the Arts and the Department of Business Leadership and Management. Her research interests include indirect communication, persuasion, creative ideation, and digital marketing. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6912-1255.

Jana Duckett, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Department of Strategic Communication, School of Global Journalism & Communication at Morgan State University. Her research interests include polymedia theory, social network analysis, design thinking pedagogy, and media effects. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3159-6145.

To Cite this Article:

Fletcher, C., Perry, S. D., Eschler-Freudenrich, C., Powers, J., Khoo, F., Dunbar-Treadwell, B., Nyamwange, B., Besant, H., & Duckett, J. (2022). Educating and debating social and political issues in the Naperville lyceum. *Artifact Analysis*, 1(1), 1-21.